



Department of  
Toxic Substances  
Control

*Preventing  
environmental  
damage from  
hazardous waste,  
and restoring  
contaminated  
sites for all  
Californians.*



State of California



California  
Environmental  
Protection Agency

Fact Sheet, March 2006

## Proposed Cleanup Plan for Germain Street Elementary School is Available for Your Review

We invite you to review and comment on a draft environmental cleanup plan to upgrade the existing methane gas monitoring and venting system at Germain Street Elementary School located at 20730 Germain Street in Chatsworth, California, 91311. A recent site investigation conducted under the oversight of our agency, the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC), found methane gas in the soil on the school site at levels that could pose a potential health risk if it was in a confined space.

The Los Angeles Unified School District prepared the plan, called a Draft Removal Action Workplan (RAW), outlining the details of the activities proposed. We believe this plan is the best way to remove methane gas from the soil at the school. If approved, the plan will allow for the installation of an upgraded system to collect, vent and monitor for the presence of methane gas under school structures. We believe this plan will protect students, faculty, public health and the environment. The Draft RAW and other related project documents are available at the local information repositories listed on page 4 of this fact sheet. DTSC is part of the California Environmental Protection Agency. Our role is to protect public health and the environment. We are overseeing all activities related to cleaning up methane under the school.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD March 2, 2006 – April 1, 2006**

A 30-day public review and comment period will be held to comment on the Draft Removal Action Workplan for Germain Street Elementary School. We invite you to submit your comments/concerns during this time. We will consider all public comments before making a final decision on this site.

Please send comments, postmarked by April 1, 2006, or e-mailed by 5 p.m. on that date to:

Mr. Aldo Chaney, Project Manager  
Dept. of Toxic Substances Control  
1011 N. Grandview Avenue  
Glendale, CA 91201  
Email: [Achaney@dtsc.ca.gov](mailto:Achaney@dtsc.ca.gov)



## **Methane Gas Found at the School**

The 8.25 acre site has been occupied by the Germain Street Elementary School since 1963. The LAUSD began sampling for methane gas at the school in 1989 since it was initially thought to be near a landfill. The sampling found high concentrations of methane south of the parking lot at the northwest corner of the school beneath the asphalt playground and between two temporary bungalows at the site. As a result, two passive vent wells and a monitoring well were installed adjacent to the bungalows, and four methane sensors connected to an alarm system were installed beneath the bungalows. Each of these sensors is connected to an alarm inside the classroom. Since being installed, the sensors have never detected methane at levels sufficient to trigger the alarm.

DTSC's oversight of the site investigation began in 2000 with a Preliminary Endangerment Assessment. The preliminary study indicated high levels of methane at the site at concentrations up to 150,000 parts per million, which could present a significant explosion hazard if allowed to accumulate in enclosed spaces. The passive vent system at the school allows the gas to release into the atmosphere without accumulating near the ground surface. Additional sampling through the 1990s showed that the gas samples did not include significant concentrations of any other chemicals.

A Supplemental Site Investigation, conducted in December 2004, confirmed the presence of methane at concentrations up to 250,000 parts per million at the site. The supplemental investigation report recommends further investigation to determine the vertical and lateral the extent of methane at the site and the source of the gas. The recent investigation, completed in June 2005, found that the source of the methane gas is due to natural geology of the area and not from a landfill as initially thought. Additionally, the methane was not caused by past oil or gas exploration or production. The gas plume is confined to the northwest corner of the school. The methane gas is naturally breaking down to other harmless gases and will eventually dissipate. The proposed upgraded methane collection and venting system

will vent the gas safely into the atmosphere at a faster rate than the natural breakdown that is occurring with the current venting system.

## **What is Methane Gas?**

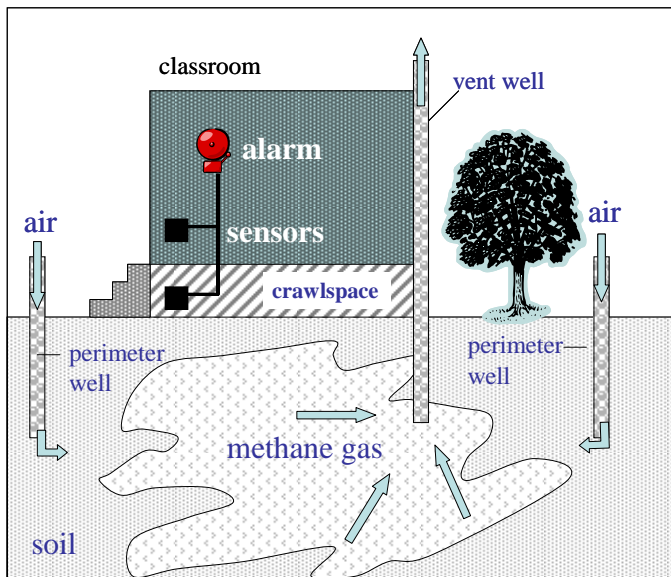
Methane gas is colorless, tasteless and odorless. Methane is produced by the fermentation from organic matter and it is the primary component in natural gas used for cooking and heating. The primary concern is that methane gas is explosive if it is allowed to build up to unsafe levels without venting. Methane gas is not considered to be "toxic," since it is not harmful if breathed or ingested. It does not cause cancer. Once methane is released into the atmosphere there are no health risks to the school or surrounding area. Due to the explosive potential of methane, it is considered a hazardous material under California Education Code. Therefore, the goal of the proposed cleanup plan is to collect, vent and monitor the methane gas to prevent build up.

## **Proposed Cleanup Plan**

The Cleanup Plan or Removal Action Workplan is designed to prevent or reduce potential risks to public health and the environment. The proposed cleanup activities include upgrading the methane sensor system, installing two additional vent wells and installing three perimeter wells. The proposed installation would be conducted during spring break when the students are off campus. The installation is expected to be completed in one week.

New methane gas sensors will be installed in each of the four classrooms located above the crawlspace currently with sensors. These new sensors will be connected to the audible alarm systems that are already in place in the classrooms. At the completion of this work, there will be a total of eight sensors: four in each classroom and four in the crawlspace below the classrooms.

Two existing 25-foot deep, two-inch diameter vent wells in the center of the methane area will be replaced by four-inch diameter vent wells to the same depth. The three additional perimeter wells will allow outside air to enter the ground to help degrade the methane. One of the vent wells



*Schematic drawing of monitoring and venting system*

will be installed in a tree well on the south side of the parking lot located north of the methane area. The second well will be installed in a tree well located at the southwest corner of Classroom 20-23. The third well will be installed in the tree well at the southwest corner of the YMCA building. The tree well vents will also provide needed oxygen to the trees to enhance their health.

During the cleanup activities the bungalow area will be isolated using construction fencing cones and tape to restrict access and ensure public safety. Access to the site will be restricted to authorized personnel.

In addition to the mitigation system upgrade, DTSC and LAUSD will enter into an Operation and Maintenance (O&M) Agreement for Germain Street Elementary School. The O&M establishes a long-term agreement regarding operation, monitoring of mitigation measures, and site activities. The O&M will require monitoring of the methane levels on a yearly basis.

### **CEQA Notice of Exemption**

As required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), we assessed potential environmental impacts that the proposed

collection, venting and monitoring actions would cause. We found these actions would not significantly impact the environment. Therefore, we are proposing a Notice of Exemption.

### **Next Steps**

At the completion of the 30-day public comment period, DTSC will evaluate all comments received and prepare a "Response to Comments." Anyone who submits comments regarding the cleanup activities will receive DTSC's Response to Comments. Additionally, a copy of the Response to Comments will be placed in the information repositories.

DTSC will then direct necessary revisions, and determine if the cleanup plan is approved for implementation. If the plan is approved, fieldwork (installation activities) will begin. The project is scheduled to begin in April 2006 and should take about one week. Field activities should not affect nearby properties. Efforts will be taken to minimize noise. All work will be conducted onsite, no street closures are planned. DTSC will continue to oversee the work being conducted by LAUSD. The methane monitoring will be conducted on an annual basis to measure concentration levels to ensure there is no threat to public health or the environment.

### **For More Information**

Please contact any of the following individuals with any questions or concerns you may have:

Mr. Aldo Chaney  
Project Manager  
Department of Toxic Substances Control  
(818) 551-2972, or [achaney@dtsc.ca.gov](mailto:achaney@dtsc.ca.gov)

Ms. Treva Miller  
DTSC Public Participation Specialist  
(818) 551-2846, or [tmiller@dtsc.ca.gov](mailto:tmiller@dtsc.ca.gov)

*(Si desea información en español, comuníquese con: Sr. Javier Hinojosa, Jefe de la Unidad Escolar en Glendale del DTSC, al (818) 551-2172)*

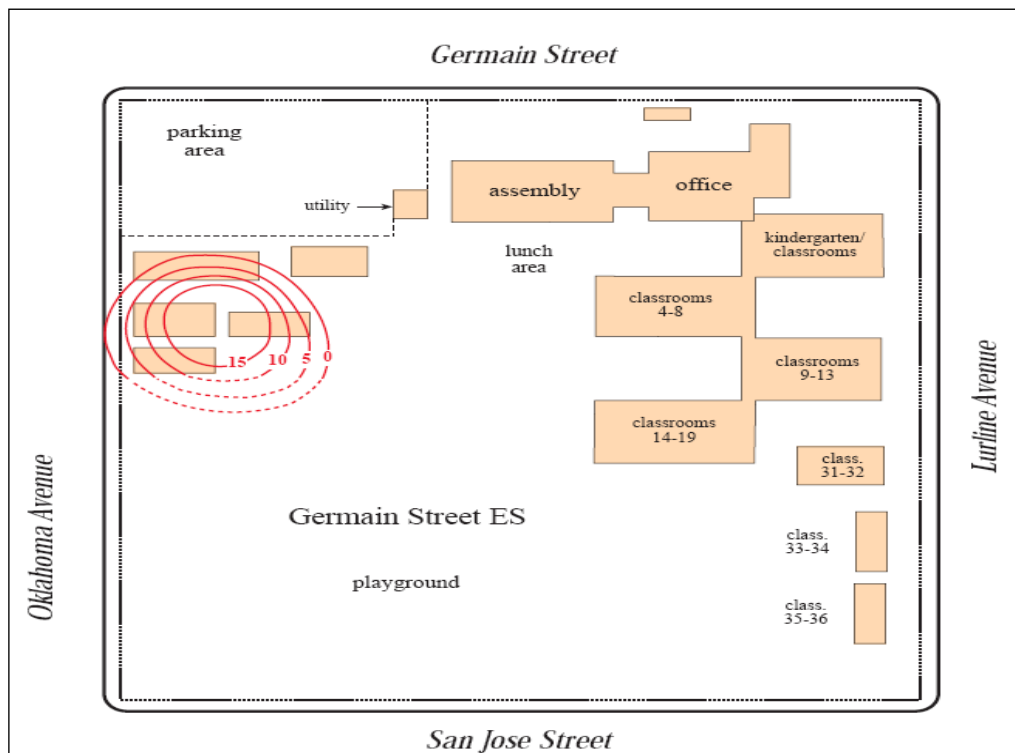


Figure showing school site and methane plume

### Media Inquiries

Ms. Jeanne Garcia  
DTSC Public Information Officer  
(818) 551-2176

### Where to Find the Documents

The Draft Removal Action Workplan, Draft Notice of Exemption, and other site documents are available for review at the following Information Repositories locations:

#### Germain Street Elementary School

20730 Germain Street  
Chatsworth, CA 91311  
(818) 818-341-5821

#### Chatsworth Public Library

21052 Devonshire Street  
Chatsworth, CA 91311  
(818) 341-4276

Hours: 12:30 p.m.-8 p.m. Mon & Wed  
12:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m. Tues & Thur  
10 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Fri-Sat

### Department of Toxic Substances Control

Regional Records Office  
1011 N. Grandview Avenue  
Glendale, CA 91201  
Contact: Jone Barrio  
(818) 551-2886  
Hours: 8 a.m.-5 pm. Mon-Fri

### Notice to Hearing-Impaired Individuals

You can obtain additional information about the site by using the California State Relay Service at (888) 877-5378 (TDD) or by calling Treva Miller, DTSC Public Participation Specialist, at (818) 551-2846.

# COMMENT FORM

If you have any comments concerning the **Germain Street Elementary School Draft Removal Action Workplan** please fill out the information below and mail in the enclosed envelope by **April 1, 2006** to: Aldo Chaney, Department of Toxic Substances Control, 1011 N. Grandview Avenue, Glendale, CA 91201. Please include your name and address if you wish to receive a copy of the written Response to Comments when the Final Removal Action Workplan is issued. Also, please give your name and address if you would like to be removed from the mailing list or added if you did not receive this fact sheet in the mail.

You may use this sheet to:

- **send us your comments**
- **be added to or taken off the mailing list**

\_\_\_ Please take me off the mailing list

\_\_\_ Please add me to the mailing list

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Email (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: (If you need more space, please feel free to use another sheet of paper)

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*Our mailings are used only for keeping you informed of our activities. We do not routinely release our mailing lists to outside parties. However, they are public records and, if requested, may be subject to release.*